1921-01-18

Manuscript: League of Nations and Peace

Tarbell, Ida M.

http://hdl.handle.net/10456/39611

Allegheny College. All rights reserved.

All materials in the Allegheny College DSpace Repository are subject to college policies and Title 17 of the U.S. Code.
Miss Ida M. Tarbell  
120 East 19 Street  
New York City

League of Nations and Peace

When the editor of "Contemporary Life" honored me with an invitation to contribute to this column she added the suggestion, "Perhaps something on Peace."

I am glad to accept that suggestion. In the first place it solves the problem which an invitation to contribute always carries, "What shall I write about?" In the second place there is a phase of this matter of peace which troubles me. I am glad of a chance to share my worry.

I take it that none of my readers will dispute that the only international Peace organization of importance in the world today is the League of Nations. For the first time in history here is an organization most nations have been willing to join which is engaged in developing public opinion against war, educating to its causes, removal, and somehow arousing in men and women an increasing faith that we can end the horrible business. Remember that until the League of Nations came into existence there were few nations that admitted that a people could get along in the world without war, and that being accepted as true the chief part of a nation's money and strength was spent in preparing itself for war.
But the League of Nations has mobilized the world’s faith that it could learn to live in peace.

And what is happening today? Why, men in high places are cavalierly casting the splendid effort onto the junk heap. It hasn’t after its fifteen years of life prevented a near-war in the Orient. It hasn’t disarmed us. Therefore, it is a useless institution — away with it.

Could there be more childish reasoning?

Are we ready to discard the Constitution of the United States because under it we have not secured for everybody tranquility, the blessings of our liberty, the welfare we formed our union to promote? Not many of us.

Experience has convinced us that this country, whatever its errors and its follies, still is a good place to live in and our confidence that ultimately we can correct its errors and educate people to exchange their follies for sounder thinking and conduct is still strong.

Give the League of Nations a chance. Give it the time and the patience which all great undertakings involving human beings demand if they are to serve the world.

Peace advocates showed little patience in the recent unhappy affairs, unhappily not yet ended, in Manchuria, in Shanghai. They blamed the League of Nations bitterly for not having promptly and at once put an end to exploitation, disorder,
demanded that force, economic or military or both be employed. If the League had not learned to do better thinking, had not been more understanding than those hasty souls we would today, I am convinced, have at least the start of another World War on our hands.

The spirit of the League of Nations is not compulsion whatever weapons of compulsion may be in its Covenant. Those weapons will never put an end to wars. It is on better understanding, adjustment, conciliation, that it must depend.

Our danger in this matter of peace is the faith we have in mechanization. Give us machinery, laws, and we can mould the earth to our liking, make all men wise, temperate, docile. It isn't so and the quicker we realize it the better for Peace on Earth.

One difficult job before the League is to show the world that if we are to avoid war the necessities of people must be considered. I may be wrong but I cannot help but feel that if great nations like the United States, England, had at the end of the Great War used their good offices to find some quarter in which Japan might expand by treaty or by purchase we would have a very difficult temper in the Orient today.

The two fundamentally dangerous factors in that part of the world are the difficulty China is having in setting up anything like a stable government and the cooped-up condition of the Japanese people, their absolute need of territory in which to live. To help these countries by peaceful means to
solve these ancient and pressing needs is the business of the League of Nations, not injecting more force into a situation where force has come to be the only practical weapon in the judgment of the leaders of the two peoples.

We must come to understand that there is something more than limitation of armies and navies needed in this struggle. There must be a disarmament of the spirit as well. No one who looks at what is going on in the world today in regard to all these vexed questions can help suspecting that there is quite as much, if not more, military spirit among those who are fighting for disarmament, than there is in the war departments of the world themselves.

It is all very well and very necessary to limit armaments but it is even better and more necessary to disarm the spirit, to rid it of intolerance, impatience, haste to punish before understanding the trouble.

The League of Nations is aiming at this disarmament of the spirit. Give it a chance.
can call a new contribution, to the issues to which she gives particular attention. I think myself that the touchstone of woman's value to public affairs at the present moment is in the quality of the contribution that she makes to world reorganization, the curbing of war as an instrument for settling international difficulties.

War is woman's natural enemy. It breaks up the thing which is her particular business in the world - the family - that stable centre which is the very basis of society. She instinctively hates and fears it. What can she do to destroy this enemy? It must be something more than organizing societies to do away with war - something more than holding platform meetings and putting up posters crying "No More War!" It is grim business, requiring the best efforts of human minds - such a disciplining of human spirits as has never been attempted, if we are really to outlaw war as an instrument of international procedure.

We must have machinery for free intercourse, a place where the representatives of the nations are constantly on watch for difficulties. We need an international watch tower, something that surveys the world from a high point as the fire wardens of the mountains in the West survey their districts nowadays from aeroplanes, in order to detect immediately the first smoke and put out the blaze.

It is imperative that the world have a League of Nations.
I believe myself that the present League of Nations is formed on the most practical lines that man has yet conceived. I don't mean at all to say that it cannot be improved — and you must remember that the present League of Nations explicitly provides for its own improvement. The last thing that it claims or has claimed is that it is a perfect instrument — merely that it is the best that could be produced at the time by the men responsible for making it.

Nothing is more impressive about the work that has been done so far in Geneva than the development there of what may be called a neutral mind. There are three hundred people in the League of Nations' secretariat that in the disputes between nations brought before them have no thought but What are the facts in the case? What are the rules of justice? And who turn their whole effort to bringing the disputants to a point of mutual sacrifice and adjustment. Troubles taken to Geneva are free from the pernicious intrigue and national greed with which old fashioned diplomacy is shot through.

This is the kind of a mind we must develop. One essential factor in bringing the world to substitute cooperation and mutual agreement for war in disposing of their troubles is faith that the thing can be done. The world has not had this faith. Even in this country, probably the most peaceful country of the world there is a wide opinion that since wars always have